Allegories of Liberality, Nobility, and Generosity, frescoed in the center of the ceiling of the first ground floor hall by pupils of Federico Zuccari.

When Francis I died, his successor Henry II chose to acknowledge Ippolito's great worth and, granting him both protection and friendship, reconfirmed him in all his numerous public offices. Ippolito therefore continued to sit on the king's privy council, many times displaying great skill as a political advisor as, for example, when he successfully negotiated in favor of the Farnese League in opposition to Charles V.

Yet Ippolito cherished even greater ambitions: he dreamed of being elected pope. For five consecutive conclaves, he did everything in his power to see his wish fulfilled, from handing out money to wielding his great political power. But most of all he played upon the enormous prestige of his family which was one of the most important in Italy as the d'Estes boasted popes among their relations and were friends of the kings of France whom they often represented before the Holy See. These personal ambitions of Ippolito coincided with the political objectives of the French king who repeatedly promised him the votes of the French cardinals in three consecutive conclaves (instead, Julius III in 1550, Marcellus II in 1553, and Paul IV in 1555 were elected). Later Pius IV (1559-1565) sent him to Paris to protect the rights and hegemony of the church there and his mission turned out to be a veritable triumph. Ippolito d'Este was considered the wealthiest cardinal and the cleverest, most skilled diplomat of his day and perhaps because of this he was never elected by the conclave. Documentary evidence is provided by two of his contemporaries, the ambassadors of Florence and Venice to Rome. The former writes, « The Cardinal from Ferrara is the noblest in family, wealth, and alliances; nobody in the College of Cardinals can equal him. Nevertheless, more than a handful charge him with being too proud. » The latter records, « He is judged the wisest and most experienced of all the cardinals. He has the most incredible degree of patience when dealing with some problem. Yet there are two things that harm him: he was born too important and is overly ambitious to be elected to the papal throne, as we have seen on various occasions: from this stems our fear that his head is filled with overly grandiose schemes. »

During the 1550 conclave, the College of Cardinals was divided into three factions: the French cardinals in favor of Ippolito, the Farnese faction backing Alessandro, and the faction of Cardinal Pole which was the largest of the three. Cardinal Pole, an Englishman and an extremely devout Catholic, was feared for his avowed desire to see reforms instituted at all levels. Disliked by the French king who opposed his election, he had often openly declared when Paul III was still alive that, should he be elected, he would make it obligatory for the bishops to reside in their bishoprics and would demand the presence of the cardinals in the Curia. In addition, it was his intention to abolish all of their privileges. Although he lacked only a single vote to be elected, he failed to obtain it. Thereafter, Cardinal Ippolito's supporters reached an agreement with the Farnese faction whereby they combined forces in favor of Giovanni Maria del Monte who, elected, took the name of Julius III and was the last of the great Renaissance popes. Julius, a month after his election, decided to show his gratitude to Cardinal Ippolito d'Este by appointing him governor of Tivoli and its territories for life. Actually, the governorship of Tivoli was not very much sought after, mainly on account of the unruliness of the local population. Cardinal Alessandro Farnese had in fact previously turned down a similar appointment, but Ippolito II d'Este decided to accept — he had some very definite objectives in mind, not least of which was the opportunity of enriching his collection of antiquities by exploring Hadrian's Villa and the countless